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ABSTRACT

In cooperative learning, students work together in small groups on tasks that require cooperation and interdependence among all individuals in each group. This digest looks at how cooperative learning can be used as an effective method for working with students from diverse language backgrounds. Focus is specifically on the structural approach to cooperative learning, which is based on the creation, analysis, and systematic application of structures or content-free ways of organizing social interaction in the classroom. An overview of selected cooperative learning structures is provided as well as a brief description of each structure and its academic and social functions. (VWL)

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Digest

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Cooperative Learning for Students from Diverse Language Backgrounds

EDO-FL-92-03

This Digest is based on chapters from a monograph in the ERIC/CLL *Language in Education* series, *Cooperative Learning: A Response to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity*, Daniel D. Holt (Editor), (forthcoming); and on NCBE Program Information Guide 12, *Cooperative Learning in the Secondary School: Maximizing Language Acquisition, Academic Achievement, and Social Development*, Daniel D. Holt, Barbara Chips, and Diane Wallace, (1992), (Lorraine Valdez Pierce, Editor), available from the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1118 22nd Street NW, Washington, DC 20037, 202-467-0867.

In cooperative learning, students work together in small groups on tasks that require cooperation and interdependence among all individuals in each group. Students help each other to complete learning tasks and are rewarded for providing that help (Jacob & Mattson, 1987). Cooperative learning reward structures place students "in a situation where the task-related efforts of any individual helps others to be rewarded" (Slavin, 1983, p.4).

When the originators of cooperative learning emphasized the importance of heterogeneity, it is doubtful that they envisioned a classroom where non-English speakers and native English speakers were members of the same group. Today, a classroom with students from diverse language backgrounds is quite common, especially in states such as California, where three categories of students can be found: (1) English-only students who have learned English as their primary language; (2) English language learning (ELL) students who have a primary language other than English and are in the process of acquiring English; and (3) fluent English proficient students who have a primary language other than English, but are fully proficient in English. When students from such diverse language backgrounds are placed in the same classroom, their linguistic and cultural diversity creates challenges for teachers (Holt, forthcoming).

Why Use Cooperative Learning with Students from Diverse Linguistic and Cultural Backgrounds?

Effective responses to student diversity include strategies that link the students in mutually supportive ways and provide them with multiple, varied, and equal opportunities to acquire content and language. Learning cooperatively in teams where "all work for one" and "one works for all" gives students the emotional and academic support that helps them persevere against the many obstacles they face in school. Not only does cooperative teamwork give students additional motivation to stay in school and improve academically, it also helps them learn the skills they will need for the increasingly interactive workplaces of the future. Cooperative learning is a key strategy for ELL students because of its potential to enhance interactions among students, as well as dramatically improve their academic achievement (Kagan, 1986).

What Is the Structural Approach to Cooperative Learning?

The structural approach to cooperative learning is based on the creation, analysis, and systematic application of structures or content-free ways of organizing social interaction in the classroom. Structures usually involve a series of steps, with prescribed behavior at each step (Kagan, forthcoming). For example, in one four-step structure, *Numbered Heads Together*, a team of students works together cooperatively to answer a question. Students who know the answer share it with those who do not because they want their team to do well; students who do not know the answer listen carefully because it may be they who are called on to answer the question.

An important cornerstone of the approach is the distinction between "structures" and "activities." To illustrate, teachers can design many excellent cooperative activities, such as making a team mural or a quilt. Such activities almost always have a specific content-bound objective and, thus, cannot be used to deliver a range of academic content. In contrast, structures may be used repeatedly with almost any subject matter, at a wide range of grade levels, and at various points in a lesson plan. Structures can be combined to form "multistructural lessons in which each structure or building block provides a learning experience upon which subsequent structures expand, leading toward predetermined academic, cognitive, and social objectives (Kagan, forthcoming).

Why Use Different Structures?

Because each structure has distinct domains of usefulness and can more efficiently reach some but not other cognitive, academic, and social goals, the efficient design of lessons involves using a variety of structures, each chosen for the goals it best accomplishes. Reliance on any one structure limits the cognitive and social learning of students. Different structures are useful for distinct objectives such as teambuilding (getting students acquainted and building mutual support within teams), classbuilding (creating a positive classroom climate), communication building (learning how to communicate effectively), mastery (acquiring basic skills), and concept development (acquiring higher order thinking skills) (Kagan, 1990). For example, *Group Discussion* is the structure of choice for brainstorming and for reaching group concensus, while *Three-Step Interview* is better for developing language and listening skills and promoting equal participation (Kagan, forthcoming).

An overview of selected cooperative learning structures is provided on page 2 of this Digest.

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Overview of Selected Cooperative Learning Structures *

Structure and Brief Description	Functions (Academic & Social)
TEAMBUILDING	
Roundrobin. Each student in turn shares some kind of information with his or her teammates.	Expressing ideas and opinions, creating stories. Equal participation, getting acquainted with teammates.
CLASSBUILDING	
Corners. Each student moves to a corner of the room representing a teacher-determined alternative. Students discuss within corners, then listen to and paraphrase ideas from other corners.	Seeing alternative hypotheses, values, problem-solving approaches. Knowing and respecting different points of view, meeting classmates.
COMMUNICATION BUILDING	
Paraphrase Passport. Students correctly paraphrase the ideas of the person who has just spoken and then contribute their own ideas.	Checking comprehension. Giving feedback. Sharing ideas.
Spend-a-Buck. Each student is given four quarters (or four votes) and must make a decision about what to "spend" them on or use them for in a particular situation. The team tallies the results to determine its decision.	Decision-making. Consensus-building. Conflict resolution.
Group Processing. Students evaluate their ability to work together as a group and each member's participation, with an aim to improving how the group works together.	Communication skills. Role-taking ability.
MASTERY	
Numbered Heads Together. The teacher asks a question; students consult to make sure everyone knows the answer.	Review, checking for knowledge comprehension.
Send-a-Problem. Each student writes a review problem on a flash card and asks teammates to answer or solve it. Review questions are passed to another group.	Review, checking for comprehension.
Cooperative Review. Students engage in a variety of games to review the week's material.	Review, checking for comprehension.
CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT	
Three-Step Interview. Students interview each other in pairs, first one way, then the other. Students share with the group information they learned in the interview.	Sharing personal information such as hypotheses, reactions to a poem, conclusions from a unit. Participation, listening.
Brainstorming. Students encourage each other to generate ideas regarding a particular topic or problem and build upon each other's ideas.	Generating and relating ideas. Participation, involvement.
Group Discussion. The teacher asks a low-consensus question. Students talk it over in groups and share their ideas.	Sharing ideas. Reaching group consensus.
MULTIFUNCTIONAL	
Roundtable. Students pass a paper and pencil around the group. The paper may contain several choices for ways of doing something (e.g., different research strategies). Each student in turn writes his name by his preferred strategy. Teams then agree on which strategies to use.	Assessing prior knowledge, practicing skills, recalling information, creating cooperative art. Teambuilding, participation for all.
Partners. Students work in pairs to create or master content. They consult with partners from other teams. They then share their products or understanding with the other partner pair in their team.	Mastery and presentation of new material, concept development. Presentation and communication skills.
Co-Op Co-Op. Students work in groups to produce a particular group product to share with the whole class; each student makes a particular contribution to the group.	Learning and sharing complex material, often with multiple sources. Evaluation, application, analysis, synthesis. Conflict resolution, presentation skills. Planning, group decision-making.
Group Investigation. Students identify a topic and organize into research groups to plan learning tasks or sub-topics for investigation. Individual students gather and evaluate data and synthesize findings in a group report.	Application, analysis, inference, synthesis, evaluation. Planning, group decision-making.

***Prepared by Lorraine Valdez Pierce (1992). See Holt, D.D., Chips, B., & Wallace, D. (Valdez Pierce, L., Editor) (1992).**

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